

# **AZIMUTH CHECK: WHERE ARE WE WITH COMMANDER'S INTENT**

**A MONOGRAPH  
BY  
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Infantry**



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## ABSTRACT

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This monograph examines why many commanders continue to have problems writing effective commander's intent statements. Doctrine writers reintroduced "Commander's intent" to United States Army doctrine with the 1982 version of FM 100-5, *Operations*. Fourteen years have passed since then and many commander's intent statements that appear in orders are still meaningless words for staffs and subordinate commanders. The "Commander's Intent" White Paper describes commander's intent as the cornerstone of mission tactics and critical to Army operations. The commander's intent is probably the most important thing a commander must communicate to his subordinates. Feedback from the combat training centers reveals that many of the intent statements do not reflect a clear vision of how commanders intend to accomplish their mission.

The monograph investigates four areas that shed light on the commander's intent concept and how it is defined, taught, and practiced in today's Army. The first section is a discussion of the theoretical basis and historical precedent for the commander's intent concept. Commander's intent is a key element of a decentralized command and control philosophy. This section identifies the characteristics of the nature of war that led many commanders to adopt a decentralized command and control philosophy and how that philosophy developed in Army doctrine. The next section surveys the current and emerging doctrinal literature as a foundation to understanding the current debate about the commander's intent doctrine and TRADOC's solution. The next step is to understand how the TRADOC schools interpret the doctrine and their current strategy for teaching the doctrine as a battle command competency in the Army's professional military education (PME) system. Understanding what is written and how it is taught, frames the examination of the problems with commander's intent encountered in the field. From this examination, possible causes of the problem are identified and recommended solutions are presented.

Finally, the monograph considers several possible reasons why many commanders are having problems developing effective commander's intent statements. The investigation goes beyond the doctrinal definition of the concept, it also examines how the current definition is taught in TRADOC schools, and commanders' ability to visualize the battle.


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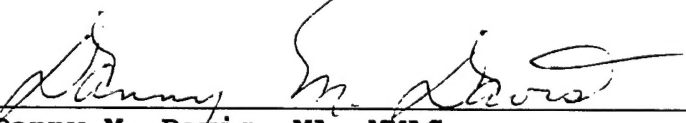
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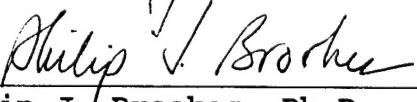
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The monograph investigates four areas that shed light on the commander's intent concept and how it is defined, taught, and practiced in today's Army. The first section is a discussion of the theoretical basis and historical precedent for the commander's intent concept. Commander's intent is a key element of a decentralized command and control philosophy. This section identifies the characteristics of the nature of war that led many commanders to adopt a decentralized command and control philosophy and how that philosophy developed in Army doctrine. The next section surveys the current and emerging doctrinal literature as a foundation to understanding the current debate about the commander's intent doctrine and TRADOC's solution. The next step is to understand how the TRADOC schools interpret the doctrine and their current strategy for teaching the doctrine as a battle command competency in the Army's professional military education (PME) system. Understanding what is written and how it is taught, frames the examination of the problems with commander's intent encountered in the field. From this examination, possible causes of the problem are identified and recommended solutions are presented.

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## I. Introduction

*Mission orders require commanders to determine intent--what they want to happen to the enemy. Their intent must be consistent with their superior's and must be communicated clearly to their subordinates... While detailed orders may be necessary at times, commanders must trust their subordinates to make correct on-the-spot decisions within the mission framework. Such decentralization converts initiative into agility, allowing rapid reaction to capture fleeting opportunities....<sup>1</sup>*

FM 100-5, *Operations*, 1982

Army doctrine writers reintroduced commander's intent to the United States Army when they wrote the 1982 version of FM 100-5, *Operations*. Fourteen years have past since this concept reemerged in Army doctrine and many commander's intent statements that appear in orders are still meaningless words for staffs and subordinate commanders. The problem may be with how the commander's intent concept is defined in our doctrinal manuals. We lack a simple definition that everyone understands and interprets the same way. We are not consistent in teaching the concept in the TRADOC school system and in conveying intent in the field.

A simple definition of intent could help every commander in the field communicate his vision of the battle in a clear, concise statement. Staffs would develop concepts of the operations that meet this intent. Subordinate commanders would be able to exercise initiative to achieve the commander's intent when the original concept of the operation no longer applies or unanticipated opportunities arise. But, maybe redefining the commander's intent is not the complete answer.

Peter M. Senge, author of *The Fifth Discipline, The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*, tells a story, "...a passerby encounters a drunk on his hands and



knees under a street lamp. He offers to help and finds out that the drunk is looking for his house keys. After several minutes, he asks, 'Where did you drop them?' The drunk replies that he dropped them outside his front door. 'Then why look for them here?' asks the passerby. 'Because,' says the drunk, 'there is no light by my doorway.'"<sup>2</sup> Is the Army looking for a solution to the problem in the "light" when the answer may really lie in the "dark?" Are ineffective commander's intent statements the result of a poorly defined concept, or is it only a symptom of a much larger ailment. We should look for an answer in the "dark."

Solving the commander's intent problem is important because the concept is fundamental to the way the Army exercises command and control in the field. When he was the commander of the Combined Arms Center, Lieutenant General Miller described commander's intent as the cornerstone of mission tactics and critical to Army operations.<sup>3</sup> In TRADOC Pamphlet 525-100-2, *Leadership and Command on the Battlefield*, Desert Storm commanders asserted that a clear understanding of their intent was an absolute requirement for planning and preparing for combat operations.<sup>4</sup> It is important that the Army determine why many commanders are not effectively communicating commander's intent statements so the appropriate solutions are applied to the problem.

This monograph investigates four areas that can shed light on the commander's intent concept and how it is defined, taught, and practiced in today's Army. The first section is a discussion of the theoretical basis and historical precedent for the commander's intent concept. Commander's intent is a key element of a decentralized command and control philosophy. This section will identify the characteristics of the nature of war that led many commanders to adopt a decentralized command and control

philosophy and how that philosophy developed in Army doctrine. The next section surveys the current and emerging doctrinal literature as a foundation to understanding the current debate about the commander's intent doctrine and TRADOC's solution. The next step is to understand how the TRADOC schools interpret the doctrine and their current strategy for teaching the doctrine as a battle command competency in the Army's professional military education (PME) system. Understanding what is written and how it is taught, will frame the examination of the problems with commander's intent encountered in the field. From this examination, possible causes of the problem are identified and recommended solutions are presented.

## II. Theoretical Foundation and Historical Precedent

*Theory will have fulfilled its main task when it is used to analyze the constituent elements of war, to distinguished precisely what at first sight seems fused, to explain in full the properties of the means employed and to show their probable effects, to define clearly the nature of the ends in view, and to illuminate all phases of warfare in a thorough critical inquiry.*<sup>5</sup>

Clausewitz

Military theory is the structure of knowledge consisting of a set of principles that explains the processes and the phenomena of war. Whether we realize it or not, theory performs a basic role in how we develop doctrine. Theory acts as a lens through which we view all aspects of warfighting. Clear insight into the fundamental nature of war is important when one is called upon to justify and change doctrine.<sup>6</sup> Before examining current and emerging doctrine, a review of the theoretical foundation and historical precedent will provide a better understanding of decentralized command and control and one of its essential elements, commander's intent. A commander's intent provides focus to the subordinate's initiative fostered by decentralized command and control.

This section will identify the characteristics of war that led many commanders to adopt a decentralized command and control philosophy and how that philosophy developed in Army doctrine. The commander's intent concept did not first appear in our doctrine with the 1982 version of FM 100-5, but was introduced to our doctrine at the turn of the century. Several U.S. officers recognized the relevance of the Prussian's command and control process as a way of accounting for the chaotic and increasingly dispersed battlefield.

Commanders and their armies strive to be orderly, but the battlefields they fight on are chaotic. Chaos, the antithesis of order, usually predominates in war and makes the battlefield a place where uncertainty prevails.<sup>7</sup> Carl von Clausewitz said, “If we pursue the demands that war makes on those who practice it, we come to the region dominated by the *powers of intellect*. War is in the realm of uncertainty.”<sup>8</sup> In his book, *On War*, Clausewitz describes how fog and friction contribute to this uncertainty.

Fog and friction have challenged the command and control process ever since men began fighting one another in war. But, the fog and friction that describe the ambiguity of the battlefield are relatively new terms. Before Clausewitz’s use of the term, according to the *Dictionary of Military and Naval Quotations*, the earliest reference to the fog of war was in 1724, when Chevalier Folard observed that “the *coup d’oeuil* is a gift of God and cannot be acquired; but if professional knowledge does not perfect it, one only sees things imperfectly and in a fog.”<sup>9</sup> Clausewitz said, “...three quarters of the factors on which action in war is based are wrapped in a fog of greater or lesser uncertainty.”<sup>10</sup> This concept refers to the fact that commanders simply cannot determine enemy intentions before they happen. The fog of war prevents commanders from being certain of exactly what is happening to their own units on the battlefield, much less the enemy’s.

Friction is a Clausewitzian concept. Clausewitz wrote, in *On War*, “friction is the force that makes the apparently easy so difficult.”<sup>11</sup> He further elaborates that while war is indeed very simple, even the simplest task is difficult. No matter how systematic the preparation for war, this friction will eventually reduce the effectiveness of the best plan of the best armies. Fog and friction will certainly cause a plan, no matter how detailed it is,

to change once battle begins. The Prussian Field Marshal Helmuth von Moltke (the elder) cautioned that no plan survives contact with the enemy.<sup>12</sup>

To further compound the effects of the fog and friction of war, the evolution of warfare, dating back to the 19th century, caused the battlefield to become more decentralized and led to higher demands on rapid decision making. By the middle of the nineteenth century the nature of the battlefield changed for demographic, geopolitical, and technological reasons.

A dramatic rise in the population throughout much of the world led to the ability of large nations to deploy large field armies that could no longer be effectively commanded and controlled by one man. Compounding this effect in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, countries developed sophisticated systems of alliances which led to the fielding of enormous multinational armies. Gone were the days when the supreme commander could position himself in a central location to oversee the battle personally.

During this time military technology also dramatically changed the face of battle and further decreased the ability of a commander, at even lower levels, to see the entire battlefield. Four significant technological developments occurred that decreased a commander's ability to command and control his troops during battle. The invention of the rifled musket along with the Minie ball improved the range and accuracy of weapon. The invention of the breechloading mechanism allowed the soldier to fire from a safer prone position. The invention of the magazine greatly increased the rate of fire, therefore fewer soldiers could cover the same area. Finally, the invention of the smokeless powder improved weapon lethality by reducing the masking effects the smoke produced from

firing.<sup>13</sup> The improved range and lethality of the rifle and other weapons led to what James J. Schneider describes as the “empty battlefield.” Soldiers had to disperse to survive. These changes greatly increased the tactical depth of the battlefield. Armies could no longer be concentrated on a small limited battlefield within sight of a single commander.

To adapt to this new environment, subordinate commanders were granted greater independence. Success on the battlefield required commanders to develop greater initiative in leaders at all levels. S.L.A. Marshal said, “As more and more impact has gone into the hitting power of weapons, necessitating ever-widening deployments in the forces of battle, the quality of the initiative has become the most praised of the military virtues.”<sup>14</sup> Decentralized command and control became the most effective leadership philosophy on the chaotic and dispersed battlefield. It is a philosophy which delegates decision authority and allows independence of thought and action.

The Prussian Army, under Moltke’s leadership, instituted two principles of leadership that allowed independence of thought and action: always conduct operations elastically and resourcefully; and give every possible scope to the initiative and self-sufficiency of commanders at all levels. These principles were based on lessons learned by Hessian soldiers fighting in the American Revolution in the 1780s.<sup>15</sup> They returned with a command technique that emphasized the initiative of highly trained junior leaders and individual soldiers. Requiring subordinate commanders to adhere rigidly to long and detailed orders leads to the executants having to act against the exigencies of the local situation. Moltke wrote in *Moltke’s War Lessons*, “Therefore no plan of operations goes with any degree of certainty beyond the first contact with the hostile main force. Only the

layman thinks that he can see in the course of the campaign the consequent execution of an original plan, decided on in advance, studied out in all its details, and adhered to the very finish.”<sup>16</sup>

The Prussians realized the changes in the nature of war and developed an initiative based military doctrine. Moltke inserted in the draft of a new tactical manual for senior commanders the following lines: “A favorable situation will never be exploited if commanders wait for orders. The highest commander and the youngest soldier must always be conscious of the fact that omission and inactivity are worse than resorting to the wrong expedient.”<sup>17</sup> In addition to encouraging subordinates to act without awaiting orders, they were also encouraged to act contrary to orders, if these did not seem to be consistent with the situation. German officers often repeated one of Moltke’s favorite stories about a major receiving a tongue-lashing from the Prince for committing a tactical blunder. The major offered the excuse that he had been obeying orders, and reminded the Prince that a Prussian officer was taught that an order from a superior was tantamount to an order from the King. Frederick Charles promptly responded: “his Majesty made you a major because he believed you would know when *not* to obey his orders.”<sup>18</sup> The Prussian’s decentralized command and control philosophy eventually evolved into the successful World War II German command and control system commonly known as Auftragstaktik.

In his book, *Lost Victories*, The World War II German Field Marshal Erich von Manstein said, “The granting of such independence to subordinate commanders does of course, presuppose that all members of the military hierarchy are imbued with certain tactical or operational axioms.”<sup>19</sup> Martin Van Creveld elaborated on these axioms in

*Fighting Power, German Military Performance, 1914-1945*. He stated that the preconditions for a decentralized command system are: uniformity of thinking and reliability of action; common knowledge of tactical command and operations doctrine; and complete confidence of superiors in their subordinates, and vice versa. Uniformity of thinking and reliability of action enhances the probability that subordinates will reach similar decisions when confronted with the same tactical situation. A common knowledge of tactical command and operations doctrine also implies common terminology. This common base of knowledge provides the foundation for the precondition and reduces the chance of subordinates misunderstanding their commander's intent. Without the mutual trust between senior and subordinate, a commander could communicate an intent, but probably would not decentralize the required decision authority for fear of subordinates' failure. Under such a command atmosphere, subordinates would probably not exercise initiative to achieve the intent for fear of reprisal for any failures.

Any system will usually have advantages and disadvantages. The advantages of this command system are: leaders at all echelons have to analyze their own situations as well as that of their next higher command and adjacent units; transmission of orders is expedited; measures taken at the scene of action are more in harmony with the actual situation; and motivation as the result of individual ownership of the plan at all levels. On the other hand, the disadvantages of a decentralized command system are: the long time required for adequate leader education and training; and a misunderstanding may be more serious than they are under control by detail order.<sup>20</sup>

The United States Army subscribes to the theory of decentralized command and control, which incorporates the commander's intent concept as a central role. This



philosophy provides for initiative, the acceptance of risk, and rapid seizure of opportunities on the battlefield. It provides insurance for rapid and effective decisions because the processing time required at other levels is saved and information is not distorted through filtering at other levels.<sup>21</sup>

The commander's intent concept is not new to U.S. Army doctrine. Evolution of the concept began in the United States Army with the success of the Prussians (Germans) in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century sparking the interest of U.S. Army leaders. Both William T. Sherman and Emory Upton made trips to Europe and studied the Prussian staff system. The early doctrine of the U.S. Army had its roots in the School of Application for Infantry and Cavalry at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Eben Swift articulated the importance of conveying intentions to subordinates in his newly developed orders format. The requirement to provide intentions was formally prescribed in the 1905 *Field Service Regulations* and in the manual Swift wrote, *Field Orders, Messages, and Reports*, in 1906. The manuals did not specify what should be contained in the intentions statement, but that it should be clear enough to ensure subordinates understood the object upon which to focus. The intent doctrine focused on expressing the end-state. The 1918 version of *Field Service Regulations* read, "If the subordinate commander knows what the general plan-*the end in view*-is [emphasis added], lack of initiative on his part is inexcusable."<sup>22</sup> The doctrine matured over the years and became a prominent concept in the 1941 version of FM 100-5, *Field Service Regulations, Operations*. Due to increased mobility on the battlefield, the only change in doctrine since the inception of the concept was that all levels of commanders were to ensure understanding of their intentions.

Even though intent concept was prominent in doctrine throughout the war, a consistent definition in Army publications was no longer available. After World War II the Army had trouble with continuity in its doctrine. With the advent of the Nuclear Age, many in the Army argued a more centralized command philosophy was required for the changing environment. Although the intent concept was implied in several subsequent versions of FM 100-5, it had lost its prominence. During Vietnam, commanders' tendencies toward the "big squad leader in sky" command technique emphasized the over control mentality in the Army. After Vietnam, the officers that were effected by this centralized control sought to change the command and control philosophy being practiced in the Army. Army doctrine writers reintroduced the intent concept in the 1982 version of FM 100-5, *Operations*.<sup>23</sup> The 1982 version placed much more emphasis on the element of leadership than previous versions of FM 100-5. The doctrine of AirLand Battle published in 1982, was an initiative-oriented military doctrine that restored the maneuver-firepower balance, turned the attention anew to the moral factors and human dimension of combat, and signaled the return to the fundamental principles governing victory in battle."<sup>24</sup>

The 1986 version of FM 100-5 echoed the importance of commander's intent. The 1993 versions provides a more detailed description of the concept. Unfortunately, there remains the lack of a consistent definition of the concept throughout Army publications. The intent doctrine that reappeared in the 1982, FM 100-5 and its supporting manuals FM 101-5 (1984) and FM 101-5-1 (1985), continues to evolve under much debate.

For commander's intent doctrine to provide battlefield leadership the initiative essential to achieve success and victory, the Army should meet the preconditions for a

successful decentralized command system. Only then can the Army reap the benefits of using a decentralized command system. This will, of course, require the appropriate investment in education and training. Also, the mutual trust between senior and subordinate requires they work together in a training environment over an extended period of time. A consistently defined concept will help develop the foundation of common knowledge for uniformity of thinking.

### III. Doctrine

*Recently, the commander's intent has been elevated to high status and, in the OPORD, inserted between the mission and the concept. The mission says what and the concept says how. What is left for the intent except heroic language? Examples of intent that try not to encroach on either mission or concept are pretty thin gruel. It has been said at Ft. Leavenworth, Kan., that intent tells us why, but the answer as to why the first battalion is to seize hill 101 is (or should be) clearly contained in the concept of the brigade commander. Thus the concept is the vehicle which conveys the intent, and the method as well—all in one neat classic package. It needs no further elaboration.<sup>25</sup>*

*General William E. DePuy*

Military doctrine defines the profession along common conceptual lines and provides the framework for effective unified action in training, education, and war.<sup>26</sup> But, even today the debate continues over how to define "commander's intent," or even if we need it. Numerous doctrinal publications contain definitions, discussion, and examples of commander's intent. To gain a complete appreciation of where the Army stands on doctrine for commander's intent, you have to survey both current doctrinal manuals and emerging doctrine contained in draft manuals and white papers. With that accomplished, the interpretation of the definitions and discussion can be as varied as the number of commanders that will write intent statements.

The U.S. Army Command and General Staff College sent a memorandum, dated 12 September 1996, to the commands and schools across the Army, requesting comments on proposed changes to commander's intent. The Corps and Division Doctrine Directorate (CDD) proposed the modification of the doctrinal definition and discussion of intent that would appear in the new FM 101-5, *Staff Organization and Operations*, and FM 101-5-1, *Operational Terms and Graphics*. According to the memorandum, CDD

initiated the change because there is a lack of uniformity in the content and the length of the statements seen in recent operations and rotations to the Combat Training Centers. It further states that the most common errors are an intent statement that is too long and contains too much information that properly belongs in the concept of the operations.<sup>27</sup>

The field manuals that help define concepts presented in FM 100-5, specifically FM 101-5, *Staff Organization and Operations*, and FM 101-5-1, *Operational Terms and Graphics*, have been under revision for several years. Each revision has a new twist on the concept. Comprehending the entire concept is a challenge. Look at the varying definitions that appear in the different versions of the same field manual and Fort Leavenworth's proposed definition:

FM 101-5-1, October 1985

Commander's vision of the battle--how he expects to fight and what he expects to accomplish (*see also concept of the operations.*)

FM 101-5-1, Final Draft 1996

It is the commander's personal expression of why an operation is being conducted and what he hopes to achieve. It is a clear and concise statement of a mission's overall purpose, acceptable risk, resulting end state (with respect to the relationship of the force, the enemy, and the terrain), and any essential information on how to get that end state. It must be understood two levels below the issuing commander because it provides an overall framework within which subordinate commanders may operate when a plan or concept of the operation no longer applies, or circumstances require subordinates to make decisions that support the ultimate goal of the force.

Proposed definition, CDD Memorandum, 12 Sep 96

The commander's intent is a clear, concise statement of what the force must do to succeed with respect to the enemy and the terrain, and the desired end state. It provides the link between the mission and the concept of the operation by stating the key guidance that, along with the mission, are the basis for subordinates to exercise initiative when unanticipated opportunities arise or when

the original concept of the operation no longer applies. If the commander wishes to explain a broader purpose beyond that of the mission statement he may do so. Intent is normally expressed in four or five sentences and is mandatory for all orders. The mission and the commander's intent must be understood two echelons down.

Often the interpretation of the concept depends on the version of the manual that is available to the officer. One manual addresses method and end state; another adds purpose and risk; while another deletes some previously described elements, but adds key guidance.

The proposed definition makes significant changes to its predecessor by deleting *purpose*, *method*, and *risk*, which are currently taught as part of commander's intent at TRADOC schools. In addition to deleting major elements, it replaces them with an entirely new one—*key guidance*. The following paragraph is proposed for FM 101-5:

Key guidance identifies those tasks that must be performed by the force, or conditions that must be met, to achieve the stated purpose of the operation (paragraph 2 of the OPORD or OPLAN). Key guidance is not tie[d] to a specific course of action, rather it identifies that which is fundamental to the force's success. In changed circumstances, when subordinates use this guidance to keep their efforts oriented on the commander's intent and, if possible, to achieve the desired end state. The tempo of the operation, its required duration, required effect on the enemy, or terrain that must be controlled are examples of key guidance.

*Key guidance* will probably be the new element of the intent that will cause confusion and lead to lengthy statements.

A survey of other field manuals reveals that our doctrine no longer provides a simple and consistent definition of the concept. Throughout Army manuals, both approved and draft, doctrine includes twelve components of the commander's intent concept. The content of commander's intent construct is purpose, method, end state, and risk. It is described as a clear and concise statement that is the personal expression of the

commander's vision, nested two levels up and understood two levels down describe the characteristics of commander's intent. Achieving the desired end state can facilitate transition to future operations. Several discussions also state when the intent is issued and in what medium.

The ***purpose*** is the reason for the conduct of the operation with respect to the mission of the next higher unit. Whether the mission is offensively or defensively oriented, the commander needs to be very specific in explaining the purpose of the operation. The ***method*** is the "how" in doctrinally concise terminology explaining the offensive form of maneuver, the alternative defensive pattern, or the retrograde operation the unit will use. The ***end state*** is the relationship between the force, the enemy, and the terrain that describes the posture of the unit in relation to future operations, upon completion of the operation. It is the commander's visualization of how the battlefield will look after mission accomplishment. ***Risk*** describes the acceptable risk the command will assume and identifies where economy of force can be used.

Ultimately, the commander articulates his battlefield ***vision*** to his subordinates and staff through his commander's intent statement which guides the development of his concept of the operation. Visualization is an art that is grounded in an understanding of the science of war. Seeing the enemy, friendly forces, and terrain in terms of time, space, and purpose is the key to success. Intent is described as a ***personal expression*** which means the commander must personally develop his intent and deliver it in writing except in the most extraordinary cases when it may be issued verbally. Writing the commander's intent is not the responsibility of the operations officer or the executive officer. It should be ***concise and clear***, long, narrative descriptions of how the commander sees the fight

are difficult to remember and tend to inhibit the initiative of subordinates. *Nesting the intent two levels up* means each subordinate commander's intent must be framed and embedded within the context of the intent of the commander two echelons up. This will ensure unity of action focused on a common overall purpose. Furthermore, the intent must be *understood two levels below* the issuing commander because it provides an overall framework within which subordinate commanders may operate when a plan or concept of the operation no longer applies, or circumstances require subordinates to make decisions that support the ultimate goal of the force. Also, if a subordinate has to assume the position of his higher commander, he will understand his new role and its overall contribution to the success of the mission. Commander's intent *facilitates transition to future operations*. It describes the desired end state and how it can transition to future operations.

Intent statements are communicated in OPLANs and OPORDs. Intent is *mandatory for all orders*. In addition to orders, *intent is communicated during commander's guidance* after the mission analysis briefing. The intent provides the foundation for developing the concept of the operation.

Even though the definitions, discussions, and examples of the commander's intent are fairly consistent throughout our doctrinal manuals, not one manual completely addresses all the components presented throughout all of the manuals. A doctrinal cross walk illustrates this point.



# COMMANDER'S INTENT DOCTRINAL CROSS-WALK

	Purpose	Method (unit as a whole)	End State (the force/enemy /terrain)	Risk	Personal expression	Nested two levels up	Understood two levels down	Concise expression	Visualization (beginning to end)	Facilitate trans. to future ops	Communicated in the OPLAN or OPORD	Communicated during commander's guidance
FM 100-5	X		X <sup>1</sup>				X	X		X		
FM 101-5					X						X <sup>3</sup>	
FM 101-5-1	X	X <sup>4</sup>	X	X	X <sup>2</sup>		X	X				
FM 100-15												
FM 71-100	X		X <sup>1</sup>		X			X	X	X	X	X <sup>5</sup>
FM 71-3	X		X <sup>1</sup>			X	X	X				
FM 71-2	X	X <sup>4</sup>	X	X		X						
BCT&P	X	X	X	X		X <sup>6</sup>	X <sup>7</sup>	X	X			
FM 7-30 <sup>8</sup>							X <sup>9</sup>		X		X	
FM 7-20	X		X			X	X		X	X	X <sup>10</sup>	

## TRADOC (CDD Directorate) Proposed Change Cross-Walk

	X <sup>11</sup>		X <sup>1</sup>		X		X <sup>3</sup>
Definition for FM 101-5-1							
Discussion for FM 101-5			X		X		

### Notes:

- Does not mention relationship to the force, enemy, and terrain.
- Strongest language—"the commander must personally develop his intention.
- "Mandatory for all orders."
- Described as "essential information on how to get to the end state."
- Not specifically stated, but mentions the intent guiding the development of his concept of operations.
- Also states it must be nested horizontally to achieve a common end state throughout the command.
- Implied by stating CO/TM commanders must know the brigade commander's intent.
- Refers reader to FM 101-5 for complete discussion of the intent.
- Mentions only the next higher commander.
- States intent is optional because "...commander's intent may be the same as the purpose in the mission statement," but then states the intent defines the purpose of an operation *and the desired end state* [end state is not in the mission statement].
- Include "purpose" only if the commander wishes to explain a broader purpose beyond that of the mission.
- "Purpose" has been deleted from the definition of intent.

An overlooked part of the concept in the field manuals is when the commander first gives his intent. ST 101-5, *Command and Staff Decision Processes*, and the Battle Commander's Guide for the Coordination and Employment of Battlefield Operating Systems has commander's intent as one element of commander's guidance which is issued after mission analysis. A commander issuing his intent after mission analysis serves two purposes. First, it provides focus for staff planning, thus reducing course of action development time. This will provide more time for the more important synchronization process. The staff can devote more time to wargaming which will better prepare the command to accommodate changes that will occur once the operation begins. Furthermore, this can reduce the entire orders development time, providing more time for subordinate commander's to plan and rehearse their missions. Some commanders think this stifles the staff's initiative, but as long as the intent is a statement of what the force must do to succeed with respect to the friendly forces as a whole, the enemy and the terrain, and the desired end state; then the staff is free to develop several courses of action that can meet the commander's intent. Secondly, an intent statement developed up front in the tactical decision making process increases the ability of subordinate commanders to parallel plan when the intent is received in the warning order produced after mission analysis.

The way the commander's intent concept is currently presented in our doctrine lends itself to debate on the appropriate definition, or if it should be used at all. What follows is a summary of current arguments.<sup>28</sup>

*Argument 1: The Army does not need a commander's intent statement.* Many in the Army today support General DePuy's argument that the mission says "what" and the

concept says “how.” He also argued that the “why” is clearly contained in the concept of the next higher commander’s order; which supports his nesting concept. Thus the concept is the vehicle which conveys the intent, and the method as well. It is well understood that the “why” in the higher commander’s concept is also the “why” in the mission statement, again the nesting concept. With a properly written mission-type order, a subordinate commander can determine the overall purpose of the mission from higher’s mission statement; and his unit’s purpose in relationship to the other subordinate units’ purposes from the higher commander’s concept of the operation. Understanding the purposes presented in this format provides the subordinate commanders the framework to exercise the initiative when the plan is untenable or an unforeseen favorable opportunity arises.

*Argument 2: Simplify the “intent” issue by simply making the last paragraph of the “concept of the operation” the commander’s view of what he sees as the “end state” of the operation.* Intent is the commander’s view of what the “end state” of the operation should be. The purpose is the “why” part of the mission statement. The “how” the “end state” will be achieved should be the “concept of the operation. As stated in the 1993 FM 100-5, the purpose of commander’s intent is to “focus subordinates on the desired end state.”

*Argument 3: The sole purpose of commanders’ intent should be to describe that individual commander’s vision of the ideal “end state.”* The only aspect of commander’s intent that has value is the commander’s vision of the “end state.” It should be clear that the term method causes confusion because it is the concept of the operation in other words. Additionally, any discussion of the purpose is redundant (or should be) with the “why” of the mission statement. The reason that purpose and method get so much

attention is because those featured are on the today side of the equation. There is no reason to look into the future to see purpose and method.

*Argument 4: Do not change current doctrine.* 1. Some argue one of the biggest problems with our Army is that we change our doctrine too frequently. This results in confusion in the field due to the lag time for changes to be communicated and understood. The last time most officers get formally schooled in a concept of this nature is at CGSC. Therefore, it takes time for change to percolate to the field. We expect senior officers to stay current with changes in doctrine through professional reading. The argument further states many of us are incapable or unwilling to do so. 2. A redefinition would create a divide in meaning between service and joint, and tactical and operational level definitions. The military has been very successful in applying the current explanation of joint doctrine (JP 3-0) and the definition of Army doctrine (FM 100-5) to the strategic and operational levels (theater commander, subordinate JFCs and component commanders). Any changes will muddy the waters that are reasonably clear for higher level application.

*Argument 5: Maintain "purpose" as an element of commander's intent.* The "purpose" is such an important part of our concept of a mission statement that it merits repetition in the intent. The need for a "purpose" in the intent statement is to elaborate on the condition that achieve the "purpose" expressed in the mission statement

*Argument 6: Do not introduce the term "key guidance" to the commander's intent.* Adding a new loosely-defined and ill-understood term will ultimately contribute to even longer statements as every commander decides what is key; and will cause a change in the commander's guidance issued as part of the decision making process. Comments on tempo, required duration, and terrain to be controlled seem more suited to the concept of

the operation. Further, the statement that “key guidance identifies tasks to be performed by the force...to achieve the stated purpose of the operation” may well lead to a restatement of some or all of the concept of the operation--redundancy.

These arguments came from commanders and staff officers from around the Army as well as instructors from many of the TRADOC schools. The arguments underscore the need for TRADOC to provide the Army with a simple definition that is presented consistently in doctrinal publications. The more elements that are added to the concept only increases the possibility for the differing interpretations of what a good commander's intent statement looks like and its purpose in the command and control process.

Developing commander's intent falls more readily in the realm of the art of war. This fact alone makes it difficult to define. Similar to painting or sculpting, the definitions of what is a good painting or a good sculpture are infinite. The varied interpretations of commander's intent doctrine and the number of different definitions and discussions in current and emerging doctrine makes challenging the teaching, coaching, and mentoring of an adequate, uniform concept throughout the Army.

#### IV. Army School House Instruction

*Very few officers understand even the complexity of war under current conditions or how to prepare well for it. While the separate elements of this combat environment are easily pictured, their combined effect is difficult to imagine. Not being able to spend enough time in simulated combat situations to become comfortable with this increased complexity, officers yearn for formulas, recipes and safe engineering solutions to make order of potential chaos.<sup>29</sup>*

*Colonel Huba Wass de Czege*

A survey of the instruction on commander's intent at the Army's TRADOC schools can shed light on how an officer is educated on the commander's intent concept and related competencies. The precondition identified earlier, uniformity of thought and reliability of action, requires the instruction received throughout TRADOC schools to be consistent and based on current doctrine if officers are expected to communicate effective intent statements and act with initiative within the framework of an effective intent statement. An analysis of the curriculum taught in schools at Command and General Staff College, the Infantry School, and the Armor School can give an indication of the adequacy and uniformity of instruction within the Army's Primary Military Education (PME) system and its influence on implementation of the intent concept in the field.

Commander's intent is addressed in four schools that educate staff officers and future commanders at Fort Leavenworth: School for Command Preparation, School of Advanced Military Studies (SAMS), Command and General Staff Officers Course (CGSOC), and the Combined Arms and Services Staff Officers Course (CAS<sup>3</sup>). The first school is responsible for preparing selected officers for battalion and brigade command. The other three schools are responsible for training staff officers and possible future

commanders. The maneuver battalion and brigade command selectees are trained on developing and communicating a commander's intent since that will be their responsibility in the field. The other commanders are taught their concepts of support need to support the maneuver commander's intent. The staff officer schools instruct officers on their requirement of providing the commander the right information to enable him to visualize the battle and then articulate it in his intent. Further, the officers are taught to develop courses of action that support the commander's intent.

All officers taught commander's intent at Command and General Staff College schools use the same student texts: ST 100-3, *Battle Book*, and ST 101-5, *Command and Staff Decision Processes*. Officers attending the Pre-command Course and SAMS are also provided the "Commander's Intent" White Paper. Some CGSOC instructors provide their students a copy of the White Paper.

ST 100-3 provides only a definition of commander's intent, while ST 101-5 and the White Paper also provide a discussion of the concept and an example of an intent statement. Like the doctrinal manuals, the content in these publications are similar, but each definition has its differences.

**ST 100-3, *Battle Book*, 1 June 1996, p. 1-24.**

...the commander's visualization of how his unit proceeds from initiation of an operation to its final end state [method]. The intent is communicated both face to face and in the "execution" paragraph and is expressed in three or four simple sentences that precede the concept of operation. Its utility is to focus subordinates on a **method** the commander will use in order to achieve success. The intent defines the purpose of the operation, acceptable risk, the end state to be achieved, and in general terms, how the force as a whole will achieve that end state.

ST 101-5, *Command and Staff Decision Processes*, February 1996, pp. 2-5 - 2-6.

The commander's intent defines the purpose of an operation, acceptable risk he will assume, the end to be received [achieved], and in general terms, how the force as a whole will achieve that end state [method]. The commander must be able to convey to subordinates a clear, concise statement of his intent based on his vision.

**White Paper, "Commander's Intent," 23 March 1995**

The commander's intent is the commander's visualization of how his unit proceeds from the initiation of an operation to its final end state [method]. The commander's intent defines the purpose of an operation, acceptable risk, the end to be achieved, and in general terms how the force as a whole will achieve that end state [method]. The commander must transmit this vision to subordinates in clear, simple terms and his intent must be understood two echelons below, facilitating the subordinate leader's initiative and coordinated actions.

From these definitions and the discussions in ST 101-5 and the White Paper, Fort Leavenworth teaches the *purpose, method, risk, end state* construct for commander's intent. Unlike the field manuals, more emphasis is placed on the *method*, the commander's visualization of how his unit proceeds from initiation of an operation to its final end state. This emphasis on *method* could be a major contributor to lengthy and meaningless intent statements. Many intent statements are no more than concepts of the operation with heroic words because they concentrate on *method*. This is covered in more detail in the next section

Both ST 101-5 and the White Paper discussions of the purpose, importance, and other aspects of the concept are more comprehensive than any of the doctrinal manuals. The following cross-walk illustrates their coverage of the doctrinal concept.



# COMMANDER'S INTENT STUDENT TEXT CROSS-WALK

	Purpose	Method (unit as a whole)	End State (the force/enemy /terrain)	Risk	Personal expression	Nested two levels up	Understood two levels down	Concise expression	Visualization (beginning to end)	Facilitate trans. to future ops	Communicated in the OPLAN or OPORD	Communicated during commander's guidance
ST 100-3	X	X	X <sup>1</sup>	X				X	X			
ST 101-5	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X
White Paper	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X <sup>2</sup>	

Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Does not mention relationship to the force, enemy, and terrain.

<sup>2</sup> "Mandatory for all orders."

## TRADOC (CDD Directorate) Proposed Change Crosswalk

Definition for FM 101-5-1	X <sup>2</sup>		X <sup>1</sup>				X	X			X <sup>3</sup>	
Discussion for FM 101-5	<sup>3</sup>		X		X							

Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Does not mention relationship to the force, enemy, and terrain.

<sup>2</sup> Include "purpose" only if the commander wishes to explain a broader purpose beyond that of the mission.

<sup>3</sup> "Purpose" has been deleted from the definition of intent.

Despite the comprehensive coverage of the concept, confusion might be attributed to the example intent statements used to illustrate the concept. In reality, they contradict some of the elements in the definitions and discussion of the concept. The "Commander's Intent" White Paper provides the reader an example of LTG Franks' intent for VII Corps during Desert Storm:

I intent to conduct a swift, violent series of attacks to destroy RGFC and minimize our own casualties. Speed, tempo, and a coordinated, and a coordinated airland campaign are key. I want Iraqi forces to move so we can attack them through the depth of their formations by fire, maneuver, and air. The first phases of our operation will be deliberate and rehearsed. The latter will be more METT-T dependent. We will conduct a deliberate breach with precision and synchronization resulting from precise targeting and continuous rehearsals. Once through the breach, I intend to defeat forces to the east rapidly with one division as an economy of force and pass three division and an ACR as point of main effort to the west of that action to destroy RGFC in a fast moving battle with zones of action and agile forces attacking by fire, maneuver, and air. CSS must keep up because I intend no pauses. We strike hard and continually and finish rapidly.<sup>30</sup>

The same White Paper says, "...the intent should be expressed in three or four simple sentences."<sup>31</sup> This statement is twice that long. More importantly, it does not define an end state. This statement is full of what General DePuy called heroic language. Doctrine writers in 1941 said, "Exaggerated and bombastic phrases invite ridicule and weaken the force of an order. Expressions such as 'attack vigorously,' if used in orders, are not only verbose and meaningless, but tend to weaken the force of subsequent orders in which such expressions do not appear."<sup>32</sup>

ST 101-5 has an example of a commander's intent statement taken from an OPLAN used in the CGSOC Applied Tactics Course. This example underscores the

requirement for having and teaching a common terminology that provides the foundation for uniformity of thought.

## 2D (US) CORPS COMMANDER'S INTENT

**PURPOSE** The purpose of this operation is to destroy the Iraqi II Corps forces in zone, protect the 21<sup>st</sup> (US) Corps flank, seize obj TAYLOR, and establish blocking positions [block] along the EUPHRATES River from SUD ASH SHUYUKH to AL BASRAH.

**METHOD** I intend to conduct a deception in the eastern part of our zone and to fix the enemy's attention while we mass our forces in the west to penetrate their defense. I accept risk in the rear by not establishing a TCF. We will then conduct an envelopment of their forces in depth to complete their destruction.

**END STATE** At the conclusion of this operation, we will have occupied obj TAYLOR and be in blocking positions along the EUPHRATES River, will have destroyed all the Iraqi forces in zone, and will have sufficient combat power forward to continue offensive operations into Iran or Iraq.

CTAC provides students with a "word code" sheet to assist in using a common terminology for the *purpose* and the proper doctrinal terms for tactical tasks when writing OPORDs, specifically mission statements. The *purpose* words are:

prevent	open	draw	envelop
allow	divert	influence	deceive
create	enable	surprise	cause
support			

The purpose statement in the example above does not really describe a purpose because tactical tasks are used. "Destroy," "seize," and "block" are all tactical tasks, not purposes. "Protect" is neither. We do not really intend to execute a task to accomplish another task. Typically the type of operation (attack or defend) is confused for the task and the task (to destroy) is confused for the purpose, resulting in no stated purpose.

The Armor and Infantry Schools also teach the concept using the White Paper and similar information found in ST 100-3 and ST 101-5, but they both depart from the stated emphasis on *method*. The Infantry School places its emphasis on teaching the Advance Course student the importance of *purpose* over task and the nesting concept. The Armor School emphasizes teaching the importance of defining the *end state* over the other elements, *purpose*, *method*, and *risk*. Both schools integrate the concept as it relates to the commander and subordinates with an exercise during their Pre-command course. Each officer in PCC develops and issues his intent to a staff and subordinate commanders consisting of Advance Course students.

Educating officers on the commander's intent concept goes beyond teaching the definition in the doctrine. It requires a detailed understanding of the science that is needed to develop the art of visualizing the end state of a battle. This cannot be done quickly. It takes years of study and practice in both the classroom and in the field. A disadvantage of adopting a decentralized command philosophy is the amount of time required for adequate leader education and training. The ever increasing complexity of warfare continues to increase the amount of time required for the education and training. Meeting the preconditions of a common knowledge of tactical command and operations doctrine, and a uniformity of thinking and reliability of action requires a significant investment in the education and training of our officers.

From 1928 to 1936, many officers attended Command and Staff School at Fort Leavenworth for two years of education. Much of the time was devoted to study and research, map maneuvers, "tactical rides," terrain exercises and command post exercises. General Omar Bradley wrote in his book, *A Soldier's Story*:

While mobility was the 'secret' US weapon that defeated von Rundstedt in the Ardennes, it owed its effectiveness to the success of US Army staff training. With divisions, corps, and Army staff, schooled in the same language, practices, and techniques, we could resort to sketchy oral orders with assurance of perfect understanding between US commands.

This investment in long-term schooling paid off for the Army in World War II. The difficulty of visualizing the integration of the variety and complexity of weapon systems available on today's battlefield has radically increased since World War II. Today's commanders and staff officers at all levels must know more and must discharge their combat functions much more rapidly over wider areas than ever before.<sup>33</sup> Yet today, officers spend only half the amount of time at CGSOC than officers before WWII. Compounding the current situation, the percentage of the officer corps selected to attend the resident course is decreasing. CGSOC is required to teach so much that many have said the education provided is "a mile wide and an inch deep." Making the commander's intent concept work takes more than just knowing "purpose, method, end state."

The Deliberate Decision Making Process is an important process that enables the commander to develop an effective intent by synthesizing knowledge about the specific situation. The CGSOC devotes time to teaching the DDMP. Due to the demands of other subjects and the lack of knowledge about the DDMP by many officers in the course, many graduate with only a basic understanding of just the process. Many do not know the detailed information required to synchronize the plan and assist the commander in visualizing the desired end state.

The mission analysis step of the DDMP is the most critical step in enabling the commander and staff to visualize the problem and its parameters. ST 101-5 does not define the purpose of the mission analysis step. It only states that from the analysis the

commander derives the essential tasks his unit must perform to accomplish the mission and that the analysis ends when the unit commander approves the restated mission. The purpose of mission analysis is to understand the tactical problem. Understanding is distilled from knowledge that has been synthesized and applied to a specific situation to gain a deeper level of awareness—a knowledge of the situation’s inner workings. We may *know* what is going on; we *understand* why. Understanding equates to situational awareness, through which we can see patterns emerging from events in the battlespace and anticipate the consequences both of our actions and those of the enemy. True understanding should be the basis for the commander’s decisions.<sup>34</sup> Currently, too much emphasis is placed on identifying the essential tasks and the restated mission statement. If we really wrote mission-type orders, mission analysis would not be required to determine the restated mission statement. The essential tasks, and more importantly the purposes would be clearly written in the higher command’s concept of the operation. To improve the effectiveness of the intent, the staff needs to spend the time on the analysis that provides the commander with situational awareness. Added to his knowledge gained through years of education, training, and experience; the situational awareness enables the commander to visualize what he wants his unit to accomplish.

## V. FIELD PRACTICE

*While a leader must be able to bring before his eyes a clear picture of the ground on which he is to fight, he must also at all times be able to picture the positions and movements of his own troops, and those of the enemy to the extent of his information about the enemy. Imagination, Clausewitz's 'unruly goddess,' helps us make clear interpretations and accurate assessments. It enables the leader whenever he makes a decision to appreciate the effect of the decision upon all elements of the troops entrusted to him, to see its influences on the last wagon in his train. Such a clear imagination [vision] is extremely valuable to all commanders.*

*Major General Baron Hugo von Freytag-Loringhoven*

To effectively develop and communicate an intent, a commander should be skilled in the dynamics of battle command. Six primary elements determine the effectiveness of the battle commander's action: leadership, decision making, information assimilation, **visualization**, conceptualization, and communication.<sup>35</sup> Visualization is defined as the act of forming a mental picture of the current and future state, based on a higher commander's intent, available information, and intuition. The commander's intent is the articulation of the commander's vision and it provides the linkage between that vision and the concept of the operations. Without the ability to see the enemy, friendly forces, and terrain in terms of time, space, and purpose; a commander cannot articulate an effective commander's intent.

The Battle Command Battle Laboratory (BCBL) published in December 1995, the findings from the Battle Command Combat Training Center Focused Rotation (BCFR) Program. The findings were the result of a data collection methodology executed over a two year period from observations of battalion and brigade commanders during rotations at the National Training Center, Combat Maneuver Training Center, and the Battle

Command Training Program. The BCBL was tasked to examine battle command competencies, information flows supporting commander decisions, and how the Army teaches battle command. As a result of the program, systemic problems with commander performance were empirically verified.

In the area of battle commanders' competencies the BCFR program identified many weaknesses that describe what a Battle Commander must be able to do. For example, the verbs that describe these Battle Command Weaknesses are *master, establish, maintain, use, execute, visualize, provide, make* [use of], *develop, plan, set* [terms or conditions], *manage* [time], *synchronize* [the battlefield], *integrate, wargame, identify, and conduct*. This is in contrast to the strengths that were described as what a battle commander must know or a description of personal attributes. Specific weaknesses identified in the study were:

- Battle commanders lack the ability to **visualize the end state** that drives the process of setting the conditions for success
- Battle commanders cannot clearly articulate **vision and commander's intent**.
- Battle commanders lack dynamic battlefield visualization.
- Battle commanders do not know and understand Army doctrine for the employment of the BOS.
- Battle commanders lack knowledge and understanding of enemy doctrine and capabilities

In an article written by Lieutenant Colonel John D. Rosenberger, "The Burden Our Soldiers Bear," the author describes the commander's intent statements he observed as the senior brigade trainer at the National Training Center. He said that most of the intents



followed the format of purpose, method, end state; but ranged from very general to a detailed description of the concept of the operation. He also observed that most of the intents were written by the S3 instead of the commander, and they lacked clarity and contained a lot of useless adverbs like “we will attack rapidly and violently to penetrate the enemy defenses.” Colonel Rosenberger argued that the statements did not reflect a clear vision of how the commander intended to accomplish his mission.<sup>36</sup>

The following is an intent statement from a deliberate attack mission during an FY96 NTC Rotation:

#### BRIGADE COMMANDER’S INTENT

Purpose: Destroy enemy forces in zone and protect the flank of the 1st BCT.

Method: We will attack with TFs in column. The lead TF will occupy a support-by-fire position to fix/suppress the northern portion of the objective, allowing the trail TF to breach the enemy’s defense in the south. We will then seize OBJ STONE from south to north. I will use artillery to provide killing fires on the point of penetration, as well as obscuration/suppressive fires on the remainder of the objective. CAS will be used to attrit repositioning and reserve forces. I will maintain a mech team in reserve.

End State: All enemy forces in the vicinity of OBJ STONE destroyed, and the northern flank of the 1st BCT secure.

The purpose, as stated, is to do a tactical task [destroy] and to do something as vague as protect. No purpose word appears in the purpose portion of this statement. The method is a general description of the concept with the unit designations removed. This example contains some of the deficiencies identified in the examples used in TRADOC schools.

Feedback from the field too often reveals operations officers writing a proposed intent for the commander’s approval. Operation officers will typically develop the scheme

of maneuver (his responsibility) and then later draft an intent (commander's responsibility). The order-writing process is a series of microscoping steps, ending in the assignment of tasks and purposes. Once this process is in motion, it is frustrating and complex to develop an adequate intent, since intent should be a broader view in terms of space, time, and other factors than the mission itself. To broaden perspective, once it has been narrowed, requires the officer to actually go backward mentally. Rather than force this retrograde thought, many find it easier to write intent statements that "fit" their schemes of maneuver, rather than the other way around.<sup>37</sup> In reality, the intent is the scheme of maneuver rewritten with heroic language, resulting in nothing left to provide a framework for subordinates to exercise initiative. Developing the conceptual outlook of the factors of the battlefield is mentally more difficult than producing the other details written in the order. Field Marshal Viscount Slim emphasized the commander's responsibility to write his own intent when he said:

One part of the order I (always) did, however, draft myself—the object [intention]. It is usually the shortest of all paragraphs, but is always the most important, because it states...just what the commander intends to achieve [end state]. It is the one overriding expression of will by which everything in the order and every action by every commander and soldier in the army must be dominated.<sup>38</sup>

This quote appears in the commander's intent White Paper, which commanders are issued at their pre-command course.

## VI. Conclusion and Recommendations

*Intent is strictly a form of military art. Unfortunately, most of us are "paint by the numbers" kind of commanders. To become better artists we need to admit ignorance and study art theory, accept risk and practice our art more frequently in a critical environment; rather than redefining the colors associated with the numbers on our picture.*

*Major James R. Lunsford*

Commander's intent concept is a valid component of the Army's decentralized command and control philosophy. War is governed by great uncertainty. It is the most confused and confusing of all human activities. The essence of war is a confrontation with the enemy's independent will.<sup>39</sup> We have all heard the common expression, "the enemy has a vote." We would be foolish to believe a course of action can be executed according to the plan. Moltke once remarked, The enemy always seemed to have three alternatives open to him and he usually chose the fourth.<sup>40</sup> The concept of the operation is the best guess based on all available information: enemy, friendly, and terrain and weather. Commander's intent provides a means to keep subordinates moving toward a common goal when unforeseen opportunities arise or events occur that contradict what is planned, i.e. the enemy attacks on a different avenue of approach, a friendly unit gets lost, or a river across the friendly axis of advance is flooded. All of these unexpected events would require rapid adjustments which cannot always be dictated by the higher headquarters. The prudent commander would empower his subordinates to react quickly toward achieving the desired end state. More than ever, today's combat environment requires a doctrine that emphasizes flexibility over rigidity and innovation over obedience.<sup>41</sup> The

commander's intent provides the framework that allows subordinates to exercise initiative for the attainment of a common goal.

The current intent definitions require the commander to address too much information. Most of the commander's intent statements seen in the field follow the *purpose, method, end state* construct. Many statements also include *risk*. The school house has been successful in teaching the format, but less successful in teaching the content. Where the doctrine introduced in 1982 focused intent on defining the *end state*, the 1993 FM 100-5 added *purpose* to the concept. Fort Leavenworth then added *method* and then *risk*. A review of intent statements from the field reveals that lengthy intent statements are usually caused by verbose *method* portions of the statement. The *method* is usually a very general description of concept of the operation or a detailed description of the concept with heroic words added. This distracts from providing clarity when defining the more important *end state* or *purpose*.

CDD's proposed definition that removes *method* from what appears in some doctrinal manuals and what is taught at the Command and General Staff College is an attempt to make intent statements more concise. But, CDD adds a new, and possibly more nebulous, element to the proposed discussion paragraph for FM 101-5—*key guidance*. Adding a new, loosely-defined and ill-understood term will ultimately contribute to even longer statements as every commander decides what is key; and will cause a change in the commander's guidance issued as part of the decision making process. Comments on tempo, required duration, and terrain to be controlled seem more suited to the concept of the operation. Further, the statement that "key guidance identifies tasks to be performed by the force...to achieve the stated purpose of the operation

(paragraph 2 of the OPORD or OPLAN)” may well lead to a restatement of some or all of the concept of the operation--redundancy.

The definitions, discussions, and examples of the commander’s intent are fairly consistent in our doctrine, but for someone to grasp all of the components of the commander’s intent, he would have to canvas several manuals to gain a complete understanding of the concept. Doctrine writers must agree on one definition of the commander’s intent concept and institute continuity throughout all doctrinal manuals. They should return to the concept’s historical roots by focusing a simple definition on the end state. An example definition could be: commander’s intent is a clear and concise statement of the commander’s visualization of the mission’s end state with respect to the relationship of the force, the enemy, and the terrain.

Commander’s intent defined and discussed in current Army doctrine and emerging doctrine focuses on the end of the planning process and the mechanics of the order--what is written in the plan. Commander’s intent provides an initial impetus for planning. The definition(s) and discussion(s) in doctrine do not recognize the place of intent in the overall planning process. The commander should communicate this vision to his staff so it can quickly develop synchronized courses of action that can bring the commander’s vision to reality. Commander’s intent, provided as part of the commander’s guidance, will get the staff moving in the proper direction early in the deliberate decision making process.

The current definition, discussion, and format for commander’s intent, as written in ST 101-5, is adequately taught at Army schools, but the schools could improve on teaching the concept and the required need to master the science of war before the art is applied in the intent. Furthermore, using and understanding the doctrinal terms needs

more emphasis. Experience has shown that an order which can be misunderstood will be misunderstood and that, to obviate this danger, it is necessary to understand and follow published military terminology.

If many commanders in the field are not writing their commander's intent statements correctly, the problem is more one of training and knowledge than poor definitions. The commander is responsible for achieving the objective assigned by his higher commander. He must develop a vision of how his unit can accomplish the mission in relation to the enemy he is likely to oppose on the terrain he is assigned. The BCFR program concluded that most battle commanders lack the ability to visualize the end state that drives the process of setting conditions for success. Lacking the ability to visualize can be attributed to other identified battle command competency weaknesses: not knowing and understanding Army doctrine, and lacking knowledge and understanding of enemy doctrine and capabilities. Battle command competencies are extremely complex perishable skills and therefore require years of training, repetition, and experience achieve and maintain.<sup>42</sup> Until the Army can effectively train, educate, and provide the battle commander repetitive experiences, many commanders will not be able to visualize the battle and therefore be unable to articulate an effective commander's intent.

Commanders not writing their own intent statement could be attributed to the findings that they have not mastered the science and art of warfighting. A commander, who is uncomfortable with visualizing the battle, will rely more on the staff, particularly the operations officer, to develop the intent statement. Providing commanders better educational, training, and mentoring opportunities will improve their visualization skills.

Once schooled in the science and art of warfighting, they need more opportunities to practice these skills.

We know the commander is responsible for developing and communicating his intent, but even the skilled commander cannot do it properly alone. A well trained staff can provide him the most current information on the friendly forces, the enemy, and the terrain and weather. This requires the staff to be well grounded in the science of warfighting to provide the detailed information the commander needs to complete his visualization of the battle. Staff officers knowing little more than the process of deliberate decision making and how to give a good briefing usually will not provide the critical information the commander requires for visualizing the battle. Officers require education on the details of the combat functions that assist the commander in visualizing the battle. The CGSOC currently does not teach the details of the combat functions needed to master the science of warfare. To compound the problem, the time to develop these skills in the field is decreasing.

A third contributor to the commander's intent concept are the subordinate commanders. A subordinate commander has a feel for his unit's condition and a knowledge of the terrain that cannot be interpreted from a unit status report and a map. An exchange of this information with the higher commander provides the accurate picture of the current situation, necessary for battlefield visualization. The subordinate commander must fully understand his commander's *intent* and the overall mission of the force. If the battle develops so that previously issued orders no longer fit new circumstances, the subordinate must inform his commander and propose appropriate alternatives. If this is not possible, he must act as he knows his commander would and

make a report as soon as possible. Again, a command system that allows subordinates to exercise initiative during the conduct of battle presupposes uniformity of thinking and reliability of action; tactical command and operations doctrine must be common knowledge; and complete confidence of superiors in their subordinates, and vice versa. From the earlier critique of commanders, the subordinate commanders' common knowledge of doctrine is no different. The Army's current personnel assignment policies do not foster uniformity of thinking and reliability of action. Officers, especially company commanders, do not spend enough time in their positions to develop a uniformity of thinking and reliability of action with their commander. The average company command tour is now eighteen months.<sup>43</sup> By comparison, the German Army is going to three year company command tours. Their senior leaders are willing to accept the cost that not everyone will get the chance to command a company.<sup>44</sup> Without the first two preconditions, developing complete confidence of superiors in their subordinates and vice versa is difficult.

A way to understand what is required to improve implementation of the commander's intent concept is to visualize it as a tripartite model. The successful execution of the commander's intent concept relies on educating, mentoring, and training the commander, staff, and subordinate commanders trinity (Diagram 1). The commander is responsible to visualize the end state described by the effects he wants achieved against the enemy. The staff is responsible for assisting the commander to visualize the end state by providing the necessary detailed combat function information. The subordinate commanders are responsible for providing an accurate assessment of their unit's condition and exercising initiative to accomplish the intent of the higher commander. That initiative



is fostered by: uniformity of thinking and reliability of action; common knowledge of tactical command and operations doctrine; and complete confidence of superiors in their subordinates, and vice versa.

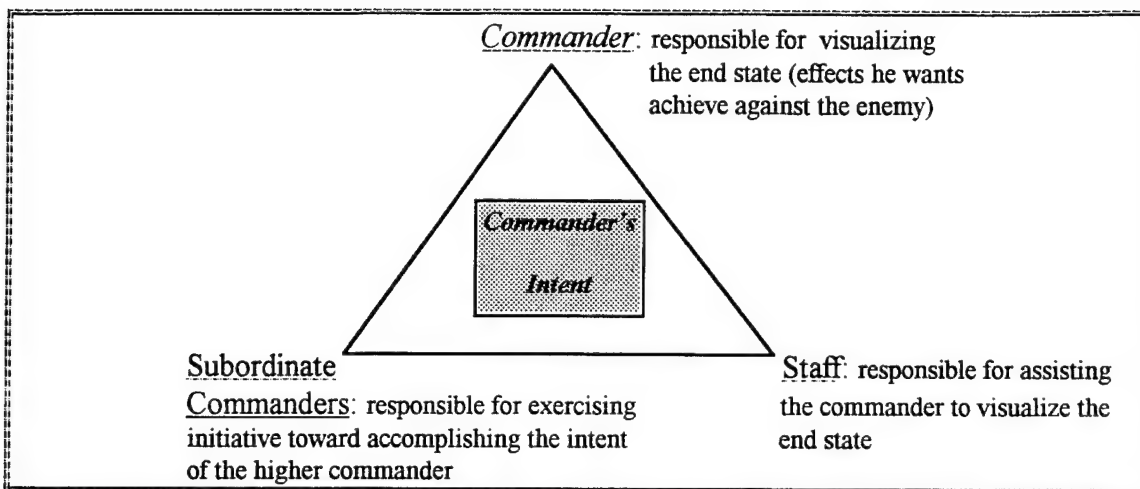


Diagram 1: Commander's Intent Trinity

The drunk and the passerby may have found the keys. The Army lacks a simple definition that everyone understands and interprets the same way. But, redefining commander's intent is only part of the answer. Commanders and their subordinates require better educational and training opportunities to develop the detailed knowledge necessary for battlefield visualization. Intuition is born from experience.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Army, *Field Manual 100-5, Operations*, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 20 August 1982), 2-7.

<sup>2</sup> Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline, The Art and Practice of The Learning Organization*, (New York, NY: Currency Doubleday, 1990), 60-61.

<sup>3</sup> "Commander's Intent," White Paper, (Fort Leavenworth, KS: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 23 March 1995), 1.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Army, TRADOC Pamphlet 525-100-2, *Leadership and Command on the Battelfield*, Battalion and Company, 10 June 1993, 6.

<sup>5</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 70.

<sup>6</sup> George S. Lauer, "The Theory of Maneuver in USMC Doctrine and Force Structure," *Marine Corps Gazette*, April 1993, 55.

<sup>7</sup> Clayton R. Newell, "Fog and Friction, Challenges to Command and Control," *Military Review*, August 1987: Vol. LXVII, No. 8, 18.

<sup>8</sup> Clausewitz, 101.

<sup>9</sup> Newell, 20.

<sup>10</sup> Clausewitz, 101.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>12</sup> Helmuth Graf von Moltke, *Moltke's War Lessons*, Translated by Harry Bell, (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Army Service School, 1915), 66.

<sup>13</sup> James J. Schneider, *The Theory of Operational Art*, (Fort Leavenworth, KS: School of Advanced Military Studies, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1 March 1988), 9-10.

<sup>14</sup> S.L.A. Marshal, *Men Against Fire: The Problem of Battle Command in Future War*, (Gloucester, Mass: Peter Smith, 1978), 22.

<sup>15</sup> Walter von Lossow, "Mission-Type Tactics versus Order-Type Tactics," *Military Review*, June 1977: Vol. LVII, No. 6, 87.

<sup>16</sup> Helmuth Graf von Moltke, 67.

<sup>17</sup> T.N. Dupuy, *A Genius for War, The German Army and General Staff, 1807-1945*, (Englewood Cliff, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1977), 116.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Erich von Manstein, *Lost Victories*, 383.

<sup>20</sup> Martin Van Creveld, *Fighting Power: German Military Performance, 1914-1945*, (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, 1980), 46.

<sup>21</sup> Daniel A. Hahn, "Leadership: The Heart of C2," *Military Review*, November 1985: Vol. LXV, No. 11, 50-51.

<sup>22</sup> U.S. Army, *Field Service Regulation*, (1918), 85.

<sup>23</sup> J.S. Patterson, *Commander's Intent: Its Evolution in the United States Army*, (Fort Leavenworth, KS: School of Advanced Military Studies, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 19 May 1995), 3-52.

<sup>24</sup> John L. Romjue, *From Active Defense to AirLand Battle: The Development of Army Doctrine 1973-1882*, (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1984), iii.

<sup>25</sup> William E. Depuy, "Concept of the Operation: The Heart of Command, the Tool of Doctrine," *Army*, August 1988, 37.

<sup>26</sup> James J. Schneider, *How War Works: The Origins, Nature, and Purpose of Military Theory*, (Fort Leavenworth, KS: School of Advanced Military Studies, 16 June 1995), 10.

<sup>27</sup> Memorandum, USACGSC, ATZL-SWW, 12 September 1996, subject: Proposed Changes to Commander's Intent, 1.

<sup>28</sup> Responses from units and TRADOC schools to CDD's memorandum on its proposed change to the definition.

<sup>29</sup> Huba Wass de Czege, "Challenge for the Future: Educating Field Grade Battle Leaders and Staff Officers," *Military Review*, June 1984, Vol. LXIV, No. 6, p. 9.

<sup>30</sup> "Commander's Intent," White Paper, 2.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>32</sup> U.S. Army, *Field Manual 100-5, Field Service Regulations, Operations*, (1941), 31.

<sup>33</sup> Wass de Czege, 7-11.

<sup>34</sup> U.S. Navy, *NDP-6, Naval Command and Control*

<sup>35</sup> Battle Command Battle Laboratory, *Battle Command Techniques and Procedures*, June 1996, 1-3.

<sup>36</sup> John D. Rosenberger, "The Burden Our Soldiers Bear: Observations of a Senior Trainer (O/C)," *CTC Quarterly Bulletin*, 4<sup>th</sup> Qtr, FY 95, No. 95-11, Sep 95, I-7.

<sup>37</sup> Eric S. Downes, "The Decline of the Mission/The Rise of Intent," *Marine Corps Gazette*, April 1993, Volume 77, Number 4, 50-51.

<sup>38</sup> "Commander's Intent," White Paper, 1.

<sup>39</sup> Martin van Creveld, *Command in War*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 187.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>42</sup> John D. Rosenberger, I-11.

<sup>43</sup> Phone conversion with Captain Stan Smith, Infantry Branch, U.S. Army Personnel Command, 4 December 1996, DSN 221-5518.

<sup>44</sup> Conversation with Colonel Anker, Director, Corps and Division Doctrine Directorate, referencing his conversation with a German general during a combine doctrine meeting in Germany.

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